

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 08190 291928Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T BOGOTA 8190

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y F O R P A R A O N E

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ASEC, PINS, CASC, CO
SUBJECT: STARR KIDNAPPING

REF: STATE 217226

1. RECENT MEDIA REFERENCES TO STARR, AS FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, WERE LIMITED TO A HIGHLY SPECULATIVE PIECE IN "EL TIEMPO" ON AUGUST 15 (BOGOTA 7663) AND TO AN UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORT IN ONE OF BOGOTA'S LESS RELIABLE EVENING SCANDAL SHEETS, "EL BOGOTANO," ON AUGUST 21, FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL LOCAL RADIO REPORTS ECHOING THE "TIEMPO" AND "BOGOTANO" STORIES, BUT WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION. THE SEVERAL VERSIONS WERE SUBSEQUENTLY PICKED UP BY FBIS, VOA, WASHINGTON POST AND MIAMI HERALD. THESE REPORTS SAID FARC HAD PROPOSED SWAPPING STARR FOR TWO IMPRISONED TERRORISTS(ONE OF WHOM LONG SINCE HAD BEEN RELEASED), THAT CERTAIN TOP GOC MILITARY HAD AGREED WHILE OTHERS HAD SAID NO, AND/OR THAT THE COLOMBIAN ARMY WOULD OR WOULD NOT BE SEARCHING FOR STARR WHILE INCREASING PRESSURE ON THE FARC. STATE 213317 REPORTED THAT FBIS ITEM 92 OF AUGUST 21 CITED AN "EL SIGLO" ARTICLE QUOTING DOL. CARRENO, THE COMMANDER OF NEIVA'S TENERIFE BATTALION, ON THE STARR CASE. WE REVIEWED ALL
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EDITIONS OF "EL SIGLO" FOR SEVERAL DAYS PREVIOUS TO THE FBIS REPORT AND WERE NOT ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE ARTICLE. (IF THE DEPARTMENT OR FBIS CAN PINPOINT THE SOURCE MORE PRECISELY THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL).

2. WE HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR SEVERAL DAYS TO ESTABLISH WHETHER THE REPORTS ARE ACCURATE IN ANY OF THEIR PARTICULARS.

SO FAR WE HAVE DRAWN A COMPLETE BLANK AT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, WHERE NO ONE KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT A FARC PRISONER EXCHANGE REQUEST OR ABOUT ANY OFFICIAL STATEMENTS IN RESPONSE TO SUCH A REQUEST REGARDING STARR. WE ARE NOW TRYING TO CONTACT COL. CARRENO THROUGH THE MILGP, TO TAKE CARE OF THAT ONE REMAINING LOOSE THREAD, AND HOPE HE MAY ALSO BE ABLE TO HELP US ANSWER THE QUESTION POSED IN THE 1ST SENTENCE OF PARAGRAPH 1 OF REFTTEL.

3. IN THE BROADER CONTEXT, WE ARE CONFIDENT THE NEW COG IS AS AWARE AS ITS PREDECESSOR, OF THE USG'S POLICY ON TERROISM, AND OF MRS. JENSEN'S PREDICAMENT IN TRYING TO SECURE HER SON'S RELEASE IN LIGHT OF THAT POLICY. FOREIGN MINISTER LIEVANO, IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR ABOUT THE STARR CASE SHORTLY AFTER THE NEW GOVERNMENT TOOK OFFICE, INDICATED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CHANGE ON THE GOC'S PART WITH RESPECT TO THE HANDLING OF THE STARR CASE (INCLUDING BY US). IN OTHER WORDS, WE BELIEVE THE NEW GOC WILL CONTINUE TO WINK AT THE EMBASSY'S CONTACTS WITH THE FARC AND AT ANY ARRANGEMENT WE MAY BE ABLE TO DEVISE TO SECURE STARR'S RELEASE, SO LONG AS WE DO NOT RPT NOT PLACE THEM IN A POSITION OF PUBLICLY HAVING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT A FOREIGN GOVERNMENT OR ITS AGENTS HAVE BEEN DEALING DIRECTLY WITH TERRORIST OUTLAWS IN COLOMBIA.

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4. THE DEPARTMENT CAN BE SURE WE SHALL REPORT AT ONCE IF/WHEN WE LEARN FROM RELIABLE SOURCES ABOUT ANY CHANGES IN GOC POLICY WHICH MIGHT INCREASE STARR'S JEOPARDY.

5. LOOKING AHEAD, MANCHOLA IS STILL SCHEDULED TO CONTACT SORZANO ON/ABOUT SEPTEMBER 1. WE HOPE HE WILL BRING PROOF OF STARR'S WELL-BEING AND AN INDICATION OF THE FARC'S CONDITIONS FOR HIS RELEASE.

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